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ABSTRACT

To prevent policy-making from being fragmented into a series of ad hoc and disjointed decisions, it is important to be as clear as possible about the policy-making framework within which decision-making is to operate. School boards that aspire toward enhancing their policy-making function are here provided with a basic structure for policy-making. Policy-making means setting the general direction in which the school system charts its course, and the manner in which the schools are to be operated. The policy-making framework presented here is a six-step process that involves answering several questions: (1) What ought to be? (2) What is the current state of affairs? (3) What is the problem? (4) What are the alternative solutions? (5) What shall be the policy? (6) What are the results of the policy? The first question involves the consideration of values, a consideration vital to policy-making because of values' influence on aspirations, goals, and perception of reality. Determining the difference between the answer to question one and the answer to question two constitutes needs assessment. Question six is vital because policy evaluation is necessary to correct policy malfunction. (Author/JM)

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A FRAMEWORK FOR POLICY MAKING

PRESENTED TO

CSTA FIRST CONGRESS ON EDUCATION

JUNE 17-21, 1978
TORONTO, ONTARIO

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Criticisms of schooling have initiated a good deal of controversy about an overarching level of the educational institution - policy. Almost everyone who participates in educational governance is a source of policy. Although everyone has a unique understanding of "policy," there have been few attempts to come directly to grips with the policy decision making activity in education.

A starting point for consideration of educational policy making is recognition that the school of 1978 is no longer the school of 1958. That school is no longer an institution generated by a fairly restricted community, receiving from it a clear mandate, and organizing itself around a limited number of generally accepted fundamental values. Today, the schools and school boards are situated at the intersection between the society of today and the society of tomorrow - something which does not yet exist and which no one can clearly define (OECD, 1976:65).

Tomorrow is today's future. Funny thing about the future; plan for it or not, you can be sure it will organize itself around you.

The shifting shapes of the future can and need to be more closely examined by policy makers; existing information can be combined with assumptions and aspirations - the "What if ..." - to determine not what has happened but what could happen under certain conditions. Alternative possibilities can be examined in detail and comparisons drawn between them. Decisions can then be made based on informed judgements of the risks and benefits associated with any given course of action.

If we want to deal effectively with problems, we can replace chance with control in the shaping of tomorrow through policy making. Or, we can choose to apply the five most dangerous words in the English language: "Maybe it will go away."

The choice is ours.

That choice is inherent in life nobody can deny. To govern, as school boards do, is to choose, and to choose among shifting, multiplying and conflicting goals is to govern under difficult conditions. In making educational choices re "school," the ire of the public is easily aroused for you touch at once on a man's past, on the future of his children, and by no means lightly -- on his pocket book.

Life demands each of us to make tough decisions. Individuals vary in their readiness to make such decisions. Ignoring the problem or process does not make critical issues disappear.

Recognition and selection of key elements in board policy making can serve as a basis for asking those all important questions that trustees need to ask if they are to be effective in shaping tomorrow. One of the most difficult things in the governance of education is to get people to relate to policy and policy making; but it can be done.

This presentation is aimed at improving school board policy making. It is not so much concerned with or about policy decisions or outcomes, but rather the process of policy making. It should be understood at the outset that there is no ideal or optimal structure for policy making. The framework discussed here places considerable emphasis on three elements: decision making is essentially a process of choosing among alternatives; in order to make a choice, it is important to use the best possible information available; and, the process must be one that avoids the dangers of dependence on or dominance by special interest groups by providing "openness."

POLICY MAKING

It is assumed that decision making in policy is a judgemental process. Therefore, what really matters is the approach to thinking about the decisions that need to be made, and the choices that are available. Thus, the process is seen as a continuous, conscious and deliberate weighing of alternative actions on the broadest possible basis of knowledge and participation. That is, policy making is not a project task to be completed but a process to be continued.

Policy making is not a 20th century phenomenon. A sage once said: "Assemble, discuss, come to an aim, never forget the aim, for it's the results that count." The very first few words clearly indicate a process. The key, from a policy perspective, is the phrase "come to an aim."

Long ago it was observed that persons of good sense, with the exception of some classes of people, seldom fall into disputation. Obviously, school trustees, being unique individuals elected to public office, cannot be categorized as a class of people, and therefore must be of good sense. Thus, they should seldom fall into disputation. However, with the increasing importance and emphasis of educational policy, involving ever-widening interests and intervention in the decision making process, the scope for disputation even among persons of good sense, becomes broader and more intense.

Thus, policy is much like an unruly horse. Once you get astride of it you never know where it will carry you.

Policy is unruly because it lives in the beliefs, feelings and emotions rather than in logic; it has its origins in the field of values rather than in precise mathematical rules. Every policymaker -- every board chairman, every trustee -- has a different set of beliefs, feelings and emotions from every other policymaker, and the resulting sets of values are the centre of individuality.

Consider now a board of education, the members of which possess a unique set or collection of values. Now if you consider these various individual sets of values around a boardroom table, and the object is to arrive at a corporate decision on any one sensitive educational issue, the result, inevitably, is an environment of uncertainty that is most unsettling to those subject to public intervention and pressure, namely the trustees present. And yet it is the values (and needs) of those who set policy that will influence greatly the policies that ultimately are established.

Naturally, boards endeavor to escape the unruly horse by seeking some common ground fixed in the nature of things that does not change with changing individual valuations.

But try as they may they cannot escape valuing consciously or unconsciously, by logic or habit, the relative importance of the interests at stake. Every transaction is weighed at each and every point according to what is deemed to be an educational purpose.

An aside that may not settle anything, but may be worth keeping in mind is that there is no absolute solution to any one educational question (as there is no ideal structure for policy making), and that anyone who is confident that HE has THE solution (for all time) should consider himself a menace to society.

Hence, if we cannot hope to find "absolute solutions," and even if we interpret educational purpose according to variable standards and uncertain criteria, it is clearly of vital importance that we be as clear as is possible about the policy making framework within which the decision making process is to operate rather than to have policy fragmented into a series of ad hoc and disjointed decisions which make it difficult to identify a direction or course of action or even to profit from experience. Effective and efficient policy making depends not only on the skill with which board decisions are arrived at but more importantly on their relationship to each other and to the whole question involved.

A policy making process that isolates and stresses the individual component parts runs the risk of losing the meaning of the whole. That is, one of the things that can happen is that you get something that looks reasonable in pieces, something that reflects reality in sections, but when you put the whole thing together it does not come out that way. However, identified key elements in a school board policy making framework can serve as a basis for pursuing information crucial to policy makers.

For some time now the claim has been that the state of policy making by school boards has been woefully weak (Williams, 1975:1). Very little has been done to equip trustees and their administrators to more effectively exercise their policy making responsibilities. The truth of the matter is that school boards are currently caught in a web of political influences and pressures that impose serious constraints on their policy making capabilities (Cistone, 1972: V-VI). As a result, policy makers find it difficult to operate effectively in setting and meeting long-range goals. It is easier for elected officials to be expeditors than to set policy.

If anything, one characteristic of policy making worth noting here is its complexity and apparent disorder. (Lindblom, 1968:3)

Hessoid, a Latin poet, long ago said, "It's best to do things systematically since we are only human, and disorder is our worst enemy." Thus policy making is seen as a political process to which there is no beginning and no end, and the boundaries of which are most uncertain. Yet, somehow a complex set of interacting forces results in what we call "policy making," and when all are linked together, produce decisions called "policies."

Any trustee -- a man of common sense, a woman of good judgement -- will see there is nothing novel in all this, but will realize it is of significant importance when dealing with educational policy.

It is clear recent efforts to find a broad policy framework within which educational decision making can proceed have been attempted. There may be differences of view as to the relevance and adequacy of the emerging policy framework but it would be unrealistic to deny that a serious attempt to find such frameworks has been made.

The purpose here is to suggest in general and simplified terms an alternative framework for approaching policy making at the local level and to identify a number of key areas or elements that are viewed as being of strategic importance in formulating policy. In other words,

we will suggest a process or description of behavior, which, as such, cannot recommend action; but it can provide information that is essential to arriving at best informed decisions about how policy ought to be approached.

For purposes of this presentation, policy making is viewed as a decision making process that occurs at the local level -- the school board - as only the board as a corporate body can set policy. Policy making is generally taken to mean that a board, in acting as a corporate body, sets the general direction in which the school system charts its course, and the manner in which the schools are to be operated. Policy makers are elected officials viewed as the decision makers charged with public management, resource allocation, and that body who should direct the administration to carry out its policies. Policy is viewed as a general statement of intent directed toward achievement in a given goal area.

In fulfilling its proper role the school board sets policy, monitors its implementation and evaluates the outcomes. This role is crucial to local lay control of public education; it is key to the preservation and extension of our democratic way of life.

Basically, policy making is viewed as social change occurring through political action. That is, policy is

established to enhance the well being of society by making changes in the relationships between individuals, groups or institutions through the allocation of resources. Policy making is seen as a social process guided by the social environment and utilized by people free and willing to shape the environment. From a policy perspective, the social process can be depicted as follows:

Participants ——————→ seek values
(gratifying outcomes) ——————→ through institutions
(practices) ——————→ affecting the environment.

(Lasswell, 1971:19)

Figure I. The Social Process

As it stands the process does not give us very much information. On first glance it appears simple; on further review one would quickly find out its complexity which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Another way of viewing the process is that in which participants make demands on the political system from which issue decisions and action. It is generally portrayed as in Figure II.

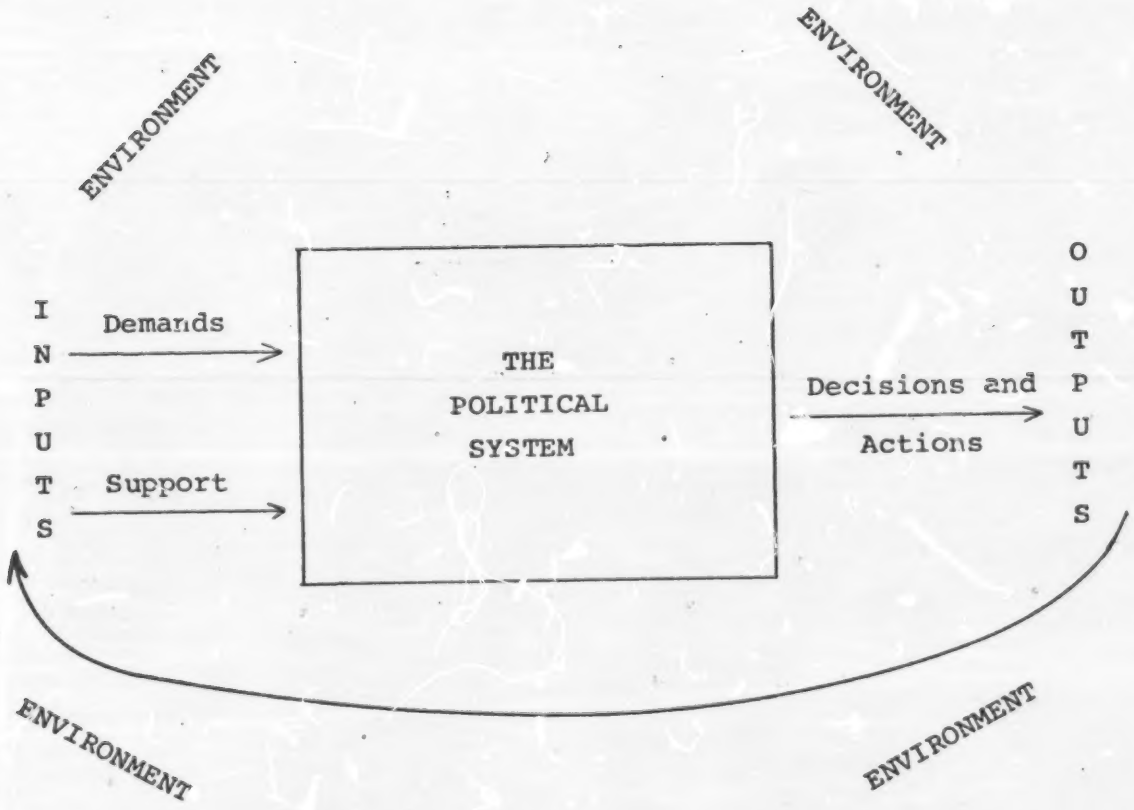

Figure II. The Systems Model

(Dye,1975:37)

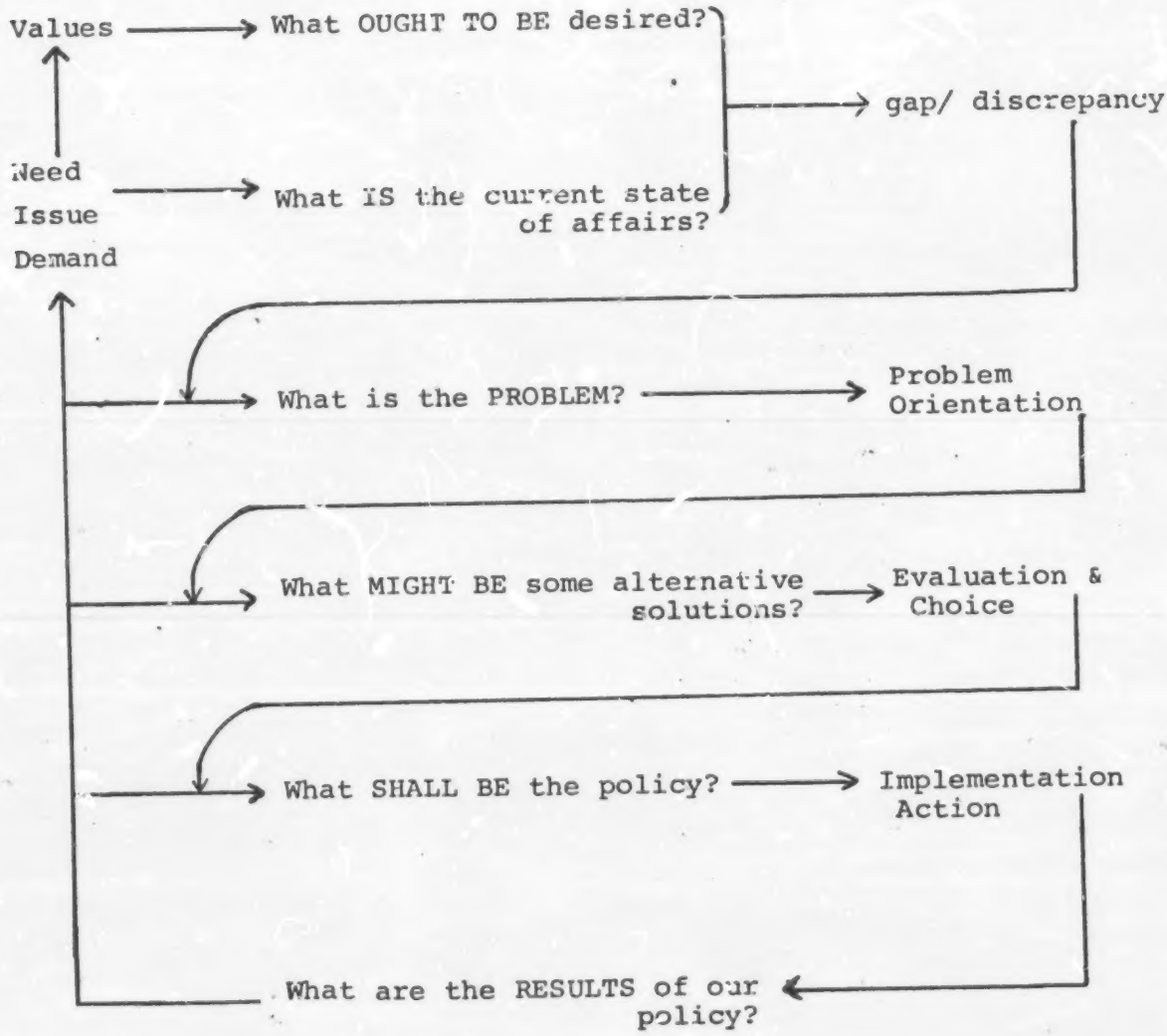

Figure III. The Policy Making Framework

Still another framework, based on basic questions elected officials should be asking in the formulation of policy, is presented in Figure III. It is the framework that will be dealt with for the balance of this paper.

To highlight the dynamics of policy making the framework needs to be explained in expanded form and orientation.

Before expanding upon the process it must be clearly understood that in any school board setting we have a number of individual trustees and their idiosyncracies, as well as a collective body of "common sense" and folklore that affects the way in which people engage in policy making. Inevitably, at least part of that folklore consists of fallacies. If these fallacies go undetected or unrecognized, they can, as part and parcel of the belief on which policy decisions may be based, lead to faulty policies.

Thus, by proposing principles incorporated in a framework which might be used to counter those fallacies, educational policy makers will be introduced to one way of coming closer to that degree of soundness of policy making of which trustees are, given what they know and understand, capable.

The Social Environment

We all function in a social environment. So do boards of education. So does the policy making process as policy cannot be made in a vacuum. The social environment essentially specifies the overall context emphasizing the demands, needs and aspirations of people, and the realities of the times and the values arising therefore are those factors which must be considered. From a policy making process perspective, the focal feature is social change. That is, policies are designed to induce changes in society -- changes in the patterns of interaction between and within individuals, groups and organizations. The approach is guided by acts of human freewill to change the environment.

Within the social environment, the dreams and dissatisfactions, as well as aspirations and desires of individuals are expressed, vociferously and otherwise, as felt needs, unsettled issues, and incessant demands. These all interact and exert pressure on the policy makers, and manifest themselves as value positions and/or outcomes within and as a consequence of the policy making process.

As indicated earlier, policies are value based. Values are so much a part of our lives and behavior that we are often unaware of them -- or at least we are unable to

think about them clearly and articulately. Yet, our values clearly play a significant role in determining our choices when presented with equally reasonable alternate possibilities. That is why some will choose one course, others another, and each will feel that his is the rational and right one. Thus, when making decisions as a board, it would be useful to recognize the value orientations and be aware of the influences these have upon the decisions of a board.

For our purposes a value can be viewed as that which an individual or group regards as desirable, and in terms which he or they can select, from among alternate possibilities, the means and ends of action. Values can be thought as making up the guidance system an individual or group uses when faced with a choice. Values may be identified by noting differences in approach by individuals with similar problems. It should be remembered, that not all differences can be accounted for by variations in values; for instance, some variations are produced by differences in knowledge and intellectual skills. However, there appears to be an inter-dependence among knowledge, skills and values.

Understanding and taking one's own values into account is not always enough. Where individuals must work as a team, understanding the values of other members becomes

important if choices and decisions are to be made which will gain the genuine support of all concerned. And there must be a willingness to accept the idea that while other individual's values may be different from our own they are not necessarily better or worse. Such acceptance can result in improved interpersonal relations and effectiveness in the policy making process.

Eduard Spranger, a German philosopher, developed the following classification of value orientations:

1. Theoretical Man: Primarily interested in the discovery of truth. Seeks to observe and to reason -- his interests are empirical, critical and rational. He is an intellectual.

2. Economic Man: Primarily oriented toward what is useful and practical. Fits well the stereotype of the businessman.

3. Aesthetic Man: He values form and harmony. Chief interest lies in the artistic aspects of life.

4. Social Man: Essential value is love of people -- the philanthropic aspect of love. Kind, sympathetic and unselfish.

5. Political Man: Oriented toward power. Very competitive. Seeks personal power, influence and recognition.

6. Religious Man: Dominant value is unity. He seeks to relate himself to the universe in a meaningful way.

(Guth and Tagiuire; 1975:237-38)

In terms of policy making, the consideration of values is vital because of their influence on aspirations, goals and perception of reality. This area is a complex one to deal with as far as boards are concerned, especially where values are expressed in the "public interest."

What OUGHT TO BE?

Value preferences are generally expressed in terms of desired conditions, circumstances or events, as they may relate to demands, needs or issues.

Generally, the OUGHT TO BE component is expressed as goals reflecting what is desired or wanted (in an ideal sense).

Goals, in the broadest sense, are statements of intent which reflect concerns expressing specific needs or demands. Goals, in the form of generalized reference points, often provide challenging points for public action.

What IS?

This looks at reality. That is, it looks at the current state of affairs in terms of support resources, the levels of attainment, what is being done to meet the need, to resolve the issue, to respond to the demand.

Gap/Discrepancy: The interplay of the OUGHT TO BE and IS gives rise to a gap or discrepancy, perceived or otherwise, between what is desired and what is, in fact, reality. This gap, once identified, must then be reviewed, considered and confirmed as a problem or non-problem. A consequential decision choice may be to attempt to close the gap to some realistic and feasible level, or to do nothing.

From this brief entery into the process it is clear that to reach a decision it is necessary to have relevant background information, and a number of viable alternatives at each decision point. Thus, three basic elements of the decision process are information, alternatives (or choice) and decisions - these will be called for throughout the process. As well, a problem orientation is necessary.

What is the PROBLEM?

By problem it is taken to mean definition of a desired end-state or result -- such as the value outcomes outlined earlier. That is, the kind of problem we are talking about here is the kind that requires a decision or policy. It should be understood that to correctly state a problem does not always lead to a correct answer, but to incorrectly state a problem practically guarantees a wrong answer.

To deal adequately with any specified problem, there are seven basic tasks which must be undertaken:

1. Goal Clarification: What future conditions or circumstances are to be realized as far as possible? How important are they?

2. Trend Description: To what extent have past and recent conditions and circumstances approached the desired state? What discrepancies are there? How great are they?

3. Analysis of Circumstances and Conditions: What factors have influenced the direction and force of the trends described? Are any of the factors identified key?

4. Projection of Developments: If nothing is done, what is likely to happen? What is the probable future of the goal? discrepancy?

5. Invention of Alternatives: What are the solution alternatives?

6. Evaluation: What intermediate objectives and solution alternatives will gain the best progress toward the preferred goals?

7. Selection or Choice: What's the final decision to be?

(Lasswell, 1971:39)

These seven tasks stress both content and procedure, emphasizing the issue under consideration must be specified and clarified so that we are always "on course." The tasks serve as a guide to the explorations that are necessary if specific issues are to be dealt with creatively and constructively. That is, here is a guide to obtaining a realistic image of major phases of any collective act. Yet, until now, little effort has been made to increase the ability of groups of policy makers to process the additional information necessary to keep pace with the growing complexity in problem solving responsibilities.

What MIGHT BE?

Once the problem has been sharply defined, a range of possible solutions is laid out and the location of potentially "best" choices within that range is initiated (Step 5: Problem Orientation). For each alternative or choice risks, costs, and benefits are predetermined. Also, calculation of the likelihoods that the various possible outcomes will occur is undertaken. The objective here is to narrow the range of plausible policy solutions by excluding the infeasible or truly exploitative for instance, and to rank the remaining options according to well-defined criteria (Step 6: Problem Orientation).

What SHALL BE?

Choice selection (Step 7: Problem Orientation) refers to the fact that ultimately someone or a few must decide on the policy options, and that is the traditional responsibility of "decision makers." Once a choice is made action must be taken to implement the policy. Developing, formulation and deciding on a policy choice to guide a system, as valuable a function as this may be, is not in itself sufficient for a school board. Beyond the task of keeping policy continually appropriate, it must be implemented or executed effectively.

Too often, it is implicity assumed that once a policy decision has been made, the policy will automatically be implemented and the desired results will be near those expected by the policy makers. It should be clearly understood that to make policy is one thing, to implement it is another. Put another way, without implementation there is no policy.

The implementation of policy is so important that all must understand its nature, process and place in the overall framework. This is so as interest groups and affected individuals and groups often attempt to influence the implementation of policy at least as much as, if not more than, the formulation of policy.

When considering implementation strategies a number of questions should be kept in mind: Is the implementation strategy a well-worked out approach, with each component fitting into an integrated whole? Does the approach make sense with respect to what is going on outside? Are adequate resources - money, competence and facilities - available? Does the approach involve an acceptable degree of risk? Does the approach have an appropriate time horizon? Is it workable?

What are the RESULTS?

Results are basically policy outcomes usually referred to as effects or impacts of a policy on actual conditions. From a policy perspective it is essential to determine the outcomes of policy in the social system as these serve via the feedback loop as the inputs into both the social and policy making system. Questions such as: Are we making satisfactory progress with respect to our policy goals? Are our policies still valid? These are important for this is one way of finding out what is actually happening and how reality differs from what was intended by those responsible for the policy selected. As soon as a product varies critically from the desired state, the system should report this information, modify the condition automatically, correct the malfunction, or stop.

Policy evaluation asks questions of the following sorts: What policies and programs were successful or unsuccessful? How can that performance be assessed and measured? A termination (stop) decision refers to the adjustment of policies and programs that have become redundant, outmoded, or unnecessary. Here, too, a thorough evaluation is necessary. Who, for instance, will a policy termination affect? How? What costs will they have to bear? Can they be met from other sources? To ignore this phase

in policy making has mostly negative implications for policy and the poeple whose lives the policy affects. Without this feedback policy makers must feel like those who don't know where they're going, who don't know where they are when they get there, and who don't know where they were when they get back. (Columbus Syndrome)

Feedback through the system impacts the social system in terms of needs, demands and issues which again give rise to values (and value preferences) and appropriate subsequent action.

CONCLUSION

The framework presented here is structured on the premise that policy making at the school board level basically is a socio-political change process. The framework presented, while highly simplified and generalized, focused on the more important questions and aspects which should be considered in policy making.

Essentially, the framework attempts to stress the importance of having a logical approach to policy making. It provides school boards with a basic structure for policy making. It is here presented for consideration by those boards that aspire toward enhancing their policy making role.

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